

Message Text

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47

ACTION AF-04

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ADP-00 NEA-06 NSC-10 NSCE-00 CIAE-00

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FM AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6554

INFO USINT CAIRO

C O N F I D E N T I A L KHARTOUM 1089

LIMDIS

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR SU

SUBJECT: PRESS STORIES ON KHARTOUM TRIAL

REF: (A) STATE 91152; (B) KHARTOUM 1081

1. BEGIN SUMMARY. FONMIN UNDERSEC REITERATES GOS COMMITMENT TO TRIAL OF TERRORISTS. FONMIN CONSIDERING ISSUING STATEMENT. CHARGE NOTES PASSAGE OF TIME TENDS STIMULATE SPECULATIVE STORIES. FLURRY MAY HAVE SALUTARY IMPACT IN DEMONSTRATING DELAY CANNOT BE INDEFINITE WITHOUT COST OF ADVERSE WESTERN PRESS PUBLICITY. END SUMMARY.

2. OFFICIAL GOS VIEW. AS INDICATED REFTEL, FONMIN UNDERSEC OBEID ASKED CHARGE CALL AND INFORMED OF PRESS STORIES ALLEGING INDEFINITE DELAY TRIAL KHARTOUM TERRORISTS AND IMPACT ON

ASSIGNING US AMB TO SUDAN. CHARGE OUTLINED NYTIMES, AFP AND BEIRUT DAILY STAR (AP) ARTICLES (REFTEL B). OBEID SAID HE AWARE THESE STORIES IN INTERNATIONAL PRESS, BUT GOS PLACES NO CREDENCE IN THEM AND THEY ARE " NOT BEING CARRIED " IN SUDANESE
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PRESS. HE REITERATED GOS POSITION TERRORISTS WILL BE BROUGHT TO TRIAL " AT AN APPROPRIATE TIME" AND WILL BE PUNISHED IF GUILTY. IN MILD PROBE, HE NOTED GOS NOT AWARE ANY USG STATEMENT LINKING NAMING US AMB TO TRIAL OUTCOME AND GOS HAS NOT ASSUMED A LINK. HE INTENDS DISCUSS WITH FONMIN MANSOUR KHALID WHETHER ANY GOS STATEMENT WOULD BE USEFUL AND WILL INFORM US IF FONMIN DECIDES ISSUE ONE. HE INDICATED SOME PIQUE AT MININFO UMAR AL- HAJ MUSA FOR SPEAKING WITH PRESS AND NOTED HIS COMMENTS COULD BE INTERPRETED DIFFERENT WAYS.

3. TIME AND SPECULATION. DURING DISCUSSION, CHARGE NOTED DEPT RECEIVES RECURRING QUERIES FROM NEWSMEN ON PROGRESS GOS INVESTIGATION AND TIMING OF TRIAL AND HAS RESPONDED THAT GOS IS HANDLING SUCH MATTERS WITHIN SUDANESE JUDICIAL PROCESS. USG POSTURE BASED ON GOS PUBLIC AND PRIVATE STATEMENTS CONCERNING TRIAL AND APPROPRIATE PUNISHMENT AND OUR CONFIDENCE THEY WILL IN FACT BE IMPLEMENTED. IT IS ALSO APPARENT THAT AS TIME PASSES WITHOUT A TRIAL MORE SPECULATIVE PRESS STORIES CAN BE EXPECTED. INDEED, ELEMENTS EXIST WHO HAVE AN INTEREST IN STIMULATING DOUBTS AND DISTORTIONS IN HOPE THEY WILL HAVE HARMFUL IMPACT ON US- SUDAN RELATIONS. OBEID AGREED. CHARGE ALSO NOTED CURRENT DEPT PRESS GUIDANCE USG HAS NOT ASSOCIATED TERRORIST TRIAL WITH ASSIGNMENT US AMBASSADOR.

4. COMMENT: ALACRITY WITH WHICH OBEID RESPONDED THESE PRESS ALLEGATIONS INDICATES FONMIN RECOGNITION SENSITIVITY OF ISSUE. TRIAL DELAY HAS UNTIL NOW REPRESENTED PATH OF LEAST RESISTANCE. CONTINUING THEME IN INTERNATIONAL PRESS ALONG LINES NYTIMES ARTICLE WOULD BE COUNTER- PRODUCTIVE, BUT THIS INSTANCE IS PROBABLY SALUTARY IN DEMONSTRATING THERE IS SOME FINITE LIMIT TO WHICH ANY DELAY CAN BE EXTENDED WITHOUT INVOKING ADVERSE PUBLICITY IN WESTERN PRESS.
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